

# CFSP's 20th Anniversary Invites Reflection, Celebration

By Mike Pehanich

**CFSP**  
PERSONAL  
GROWTH

**20**  
years

*Twenty years ago, NAFEM instituted the Certified Foodservice Professional program to recognize established standards for foodservice professionalism. You've come a long way!*

**F**oodservice personnel with a foot in the not-so-distant past often recall with a mix of marvel and disbelief how foodservice equipment salesmen hawked their wares to prospective customers a generation ago. Back in pre-CFSP years, the industry had no measuring stick to separate the greenest sales recruit from a seasoned, knowledgeable veteran.

"Frankly, what I witnessed was unprofessional selling," says one prominent industry figure. "The standard back then was selling your goods at the bar. A lot of folks had good knowledge of their product lines. But if a customer wanted help beyond that reach, they were in trouble."

Many shared that perception.

"The industry salesmen were getting a reputation similar to that of the used car salesman," recalls Art Dunham, CFSP, foodservice administrator, Pinellas County Schools, Florida, who served on the first elected CFSP Board of Governors (CBOG). "We needed a distinction that had lasting meaning and added professionalism and knowledge to all who passed a rigorous examination process."

"At the time, I looked around at my competition and saw people schlepping pots and pans out of the back of a truck," recalls Bruce Butler, CFSP, regional group manager, The Wasserstrom Company, Hamilton, Ohio. "I was working with dietitians, nurses and other people with a professional designation. Finally, we had a chance to set ourselves apart and bring professionalism to our industry."

That chance came officially in 1987 when men and women tested their industry knowledge at the NAFEM exhibition in Las Vegas, Nev. Those who passed earned the right to place the initials CFSP after their names, designating their new-found status as Certified Foodservice Professionals.

It was the dawn of an era.

### **Birth of a Designation**

Few programs have had such a profound effect on an industry.

Four industry veterans laid the program's foundation: Ira Kaplan, CFSP, former NAFEM president and then president of Servolift/Eastern Corp.; former NAFEM president Louise O'Sullivan, CFSP, then president of Groen; Verdis Norton, CFSP, and Jack Wilson, CFSP, of Hobart USA. Determining what was





BAGGOTT



BUTLER



CLARK



KRIER



O'SULLIVAN

critical knowledge, establishing standards, creating a study manual, assembling a comprehensive test...this was uncharted territory for anyone in foodservice. The four trailblazers weren't just drawing a line in the sand that arbitrarily defined the industry elite; they were creating a conduit for communication that would dignify the entire industry.

Verdis Norton, Jack Wilson's boss, prodded him to get involved in the program. "I had a background in education and training," explains Wilson, today president of Franke Resupply Systems, LaVergne, Tenn. "So guess who wrote that first test?"

The institutional ancestor of the CFSP program is NAFEM's Dealer Education Committee, which drew participants to Purdue University for enhanced sales training and industry education. In 1985, the program broadened its reach.

"We had a good program for dealers, but then we asked ourselves, 'How about spreading it to our members and serve the whole industry?'" recalls Louise O'Sullivan, president, PRIMEAdvantage, a manufacturer/buyer consortium of OEM materials, components and supplies. "The whole idea was to stimulate education and recognize professionalism," she emphasizes.

"We had four requirements: it had to be tough; it had to be the top-notch program in the industry; it had to be open for anyone in the industry to join; and we needed to build it to several levels so that participants could continue to grow."

No one associated with that inaugural test claims to have had the vision to see its long-term impact.

Fortunately, instinct and commitment trumped vision. Twenty years later, the industry is well-stocked with knowledgeable, well-rounded professionals in sales, manufacturing, distribution and retail who are eager to credit their CFSP education for their broad base of foodservice understanding.

"First of all, we are more valuable to our customer, hypothetically at least," says Wilson. "Secondly, it helps people going through the program develop a more integrated view of their product and how it fits in."

Indeed the exam, along with the entire program, has grown in breadth and sophistication, as is reflected in the CFSP study guide – *An Introduction to the Foodservice Industry* — which has morphed from a 30-page pamphlet into a textbook covering everything from front of the house to back of the house.

It has become an educational tool for the entire foodservice industry from dealers and manufacturers' sales personnel to utility companies, restaurant personnel and other end users across the country and beyond.

"Prior to the (CFSP) program, there was nothing you could do — no course you could take — to certify yourself," says Jeff Wood, CFSP, president and CEO, Integrated Marketing Technologies, who contributed the refrigeration portion of that inaugural CFSP examination and, later, the concept of a study guide for would-be CFSPs.

## CFSP 20th Anniversary

On the 20th anniversary of the Certified Foodservice Professional (CFSP) program, NAFEM congratulates the following individuals who have maintained their CFSP certification for 20 years.

George E. Baggott, CFSP

Bruce S. Butler, CFSP

Peter Cabrelli, CFSP

Robert D. Clark, CFSP

Arthur F. Dunham, CFSP

John Q. English, CFSP

Vince Feehan, CFSP

Edward C. Heina, CFSP

James T. Krier, CFSP

Louise O'Sullivan, CFSP

Jeffrey S. Simon, CFSP

Walter Simon, CFSP

Bill Squier, CFSP

Iris Sauber, CFSP

William J. Stella, CFSP

Geoffrey L. Westley, CFSP

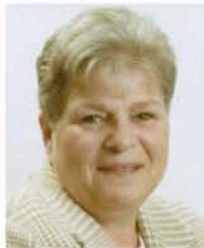
Jack S. Wilson, CFSP

Allan E. Witt, CFSP

Jeff Wood, CFSP

George W. Zawacki, CFSP, FCSI





SAUBER



WESTLEY



WILSON



WOOD

## Group Synergy

Propelling the program was its recognition efforts. Norton advocated awards and other honoree mementoes as participants earned their “degree.” Over the years, many grads have worn pins, displayed framed certificates, read their names in print, viewed their names on The NAFEM Show CFSP Wall of Fame, and even worn rings and jewelry in honor of their achievement.

“That CFSP pin differentiates the professional from the wannabe,” says Wood, one of that historic group of ’87 graduates.

But, interestingly, the recognition and prestige that have accrued to program completion rarely, if ever, eclipse the educational value of the program among alumni. The CFSP program indeed has flourished as a learning institution with lively “branches” sprouting up like remote campuses.

“Some of the best developments came in the study groups,” says O’Sullivan. “Those who became CFSPs set up centers at their dealerships and asked local manufacturing personnel to share their knowledge and experience. The networking was phenomenal. We brainstormed our challenges. We began to see new depths in each other we didn’t know were there – especially in the manufacturers. Steamer experts learned about lighting. Everyone began to understand where and how kitchens worked and how their products fit in.”

“It broadened your base of awareness,” reflects Bob Clark, CFSP, president, Clark, Malone Associates, Inc. “You weren’t just ‘tunnel-visioned.’ You didn’t just know cooking and frying. Suddenly you even knew enough about ventilation to get the smoke smell out of a kitchen.”

## Spreading the Faith

NAFEM members had taken to the program like ducks to water from the outset. Dealers and distributors saw its value, too, and the Foodservice Equipment Distributors Association (FEDA) rallied behind it. The learning and testing process of CFSP was becoming the cornerstone of foodservice education.

Meanwhile, some with the new initials behind their names were reluctant to read too much into their new-found status. Geoffrey Westley, CFSP, today vice president of sales, Fisher Manufacturing Company, Tulare, Calif., was perplexed that a respected colleague had not earned enough points to earn his initials. After Westley submitted a letter to the board on the matter, he was invited to join the Industry Education Committee. He soon found himself on a working committee — with the emphasis on “work.”

“We came to Chicago every other month for all-day meetings,” recalls Westley, who served the committee for more than four years. “We developed a real program. I helped write the study guide, and it was reviewed and rewritten by Purdue educators.”

## Viva Mexico! Our Southern Neighbor Steps Up To The Plate

The United States claims no monopoly on foodservice knowledge and best practices. And the more global the industry becomes, the urge to spread industry knowledge and respectability grows.

The latest proof of that claim is the soon-to-arrive Mexican CFSP program built around the tried-and-true principles that pushed NAFEM’s CFSP program to prominence.

“We have an allied relationship with our Mexican counterpart, AMAIT,” says Deirdre Flynn, NAFEM’s executive vice president. “The foodservice industry there has been interested in bringing the program to Mexico.”

NAFEM is licensing the program to AMAIT and guiding program officials through text translation and course training adapted to the needs of the Mexican marketplace. Flynn expects AMAIT to unveil the program at ABASTUR, the Mexican foodservice industry’s largest exposition, during the first week of October.

And don’t expect CFSP to stop at the bottom end of the continent either.

“We hope to reach a similar agreement with the Catering Equipment Supplies Association (CESA) in the United Kingdom later this year,” adds Flynn.



## Why is **CFSP** even more important today?

**"The industry is more complicated now...and broader knowledge of how the industry and products work together is very important. We are in a global society now with U.S. companies expanding overseas and international companies coming to U.S. shores."**

**– George Baggott, CFSP, former NAFEM president**

**"I originally wanted to earn the designation in order to stand out in the field and endeavor to better myself and my industry knowledge. I realize now that the program has distinguished me among my peers as a professional and leader, and it has assisted me in achieving my personal goals."**

**– Jim Krier, CFSP, Bi-Line Systems**

Westley underscores the importance of keeping the end-user in mind as the CFSP program continues to evolve. "If I am a restaurant owner, I want to look for credentials – a certified foodservice professional to help me with equipment selection. That was always the intent in my mind – to uplift the dealer/salesman and provide an educational process that puts that person toe-to-toe with the end-user every day. And I am always pushing that we get the CFSP message to the end-user, too. That is always NAFEM's challenge."

In fact, end-users – foodservice operators – comprised the one group conspicuously absent from the CFSP program in the early years.

"For a long time, NAFEM felt reluctant, a little awkward perhaps, about getting end-users involved in the program," O'Sullivan confesses. "But Roy Hook from Wendy's challenged us, asking why this was so. He recognized CFSP as a symbol of professionalism. Eventually, we listened and opened the program. Roy validated the program by wanting to be part of it."

That the program has become universal may be its ultimate validation.

"Everyone takes it today – manufacturers, reps, distributors, dealers," says Iris Sauber, CFSP, foodservice consultant and president, Sauber and Associates, LLC. "That's why it's important. It is saying: 'We are one cohesive unit of professional foodservice personnel.' It doesn't matter in which channel you work."

### Staying Alive

Nothing teaches like experience, however, especially in an industry that undergoes perpetual change and frequent facelifts. From the outset, CFSP placed a premium on continuing education, demanding periodic recertification to retain CFSP status.

"CFSP has given people a sense of accomplishment as they move from one level to the next," says Wood. "You have to stay active to keep your qualification. You need the points."

Industry service and engaging in approved industry functions carries point value in the program.

CFSP certification carries perks as well – practical advantages that stem

from the endless infusion of ideas regarding need and possibility from its network. The CFSP Professional Business Center at The NAFEM Show is a case in point. It provides members an opportunity to relax, network with peers or meet with clients during the show.

It wasn't long before CFSP had become a well-recognized stamp of professionalism. Across the industry, foodservice professionals found new efficacy in the program.

Multiple-firm rep groups proliferated the '80s. Those with foresight found that the program had cachet, and many parlayed it to immediate benefit.

"We knew that if we had the professional rating of CFSP we could get more attention from the firms we wanted to represent," recalls Clark. He credits his employer at the time, Bill Lovelace, with encouraging his participation. "The designation made sense. Insurance companies have one. Real estate companies use them too. Putting those credentials on a calling card make you stand out."

"I got to where I am scratching and clawing," says Butler. "But those four letters after my name tell people, 'Hey, this guy has taken the time to learn the business and be the best that he can be.'"

Over time, the program branched into multiple tiers. Exams became more challenging, sophisticated and comprehensive, and they involved more and more facets of foodservice.

The strength of the certification effort is its strong international reputation, which has led Abastecedores Turistas A.C. (AMAIT), NAFEM's sister organization in Mexico, to adopt its own certification program patterned after CFSP. (See sidebar.)

"It's very rewarding to know you did something that has made a difference in the industry," says Wilson. "It has grown beyond anything I expected it to be. We started something...and others have built it into something more." 